THE MERV OASIS. TRAVELS AND ADVENTURES EAST OF THE CAS-PIAN during the years 1879 80 81, including five mouths' reader as among the Tekkes of Merv. By EDMOND O'DONOVAN, Luige octavo, 2 vols. pp. 1,002. G. P. Patham's Sons.

Mr. J. R. Robinson, to whom these new volum on Central Asia are dedicated, is the accepted patron of special correspondents. His position as managing editor of one of the most prosperous London journals enables him to give substantial encouragement to restless knights of the pen flitting over the face of the earth in quest of now scenes and fresh experiences. But he has something besides opportunities for making the recitals of daring adventure or systematic exploration remaperative to the special correspondent. He has the faculty of original suggestion accompanied by an accurate judgment of the requirements of the English public. He knows when and where to give direction to the energies of literary asquaint ances who appeal to him for serious employment wherein they may have a fair chance of distinguishthe first place to the current news of the day, and, ubsequently, to the literature of foreign travel. The intrepid and versatile Itishman whose adventures and observations in a quarter of the world never before described by a European are recounted in these volumes, acknowledges his indebtduess to his patron not only for generous support but for the original plan of the undertaking. So frank an admission of personal obligation is an il-Instration of the amenities of journalism which it

Mr. O'Donovan's journey was undertaken at the opening of the Afghan campaign, when the English public mind was occupied by the dangers to which India might be exposed in the near future from the extension of Russian sway over the nomad population of Central Asia cast of the Caspian, and from intrigres and alliances with the Fersian Court and the frentier tribes north of Herat. The starting point for his wanderings during three years was Trebizond, on the Black Sea, whence he set out in February, 1879, for Batonin, Tillis and Baku, on the western share of the Caspian. Arriving at the goal of his journey through Russian Frans-Caucasia, and learning that General Lazarest was about to start for the enum of Tchikislar, the limin-diate base of operations of the expeditionary colnams destined for service against the Akhal Techko Turcemans, he received permission to accompany the staff in its voyage across the Caspian. He vis-ited Chatte, which was then the advanced post of the Russians on the Attrek, and subsequently sailed northward to Krasnavodsk, the settlement near which the newly constructed Trans Caspian Ruli-road has its western terminus. After many inter-esting experiences in the asyllements on the Eastern Caspian litteral he received orders from the new commander-in-chief, General Tergukasoff, to return to Baku and pass the winter there. He determined to travel southward to the Persian frontier and to take refuge in Asterabad. This was in November, 1879, and he remained there and at a fortified camp on the frontier several months, until he was emboldened by the resignation of General Tergukasoft to try his fortunes again at the Euseinn headquarters. His advances were repulsed and he was forced to return to Asierabad. Here he resolved to proceed to Teheran by way of Eureli, a Persian post on the southern base of the Caspia; and to make a final attempt to accompany the Russian expedition in the Akhal Tekké country: and if permission should be refused, to put forth a determined effort to penetrate into that district, be the danger what it might, or should the Russians have arrived there before him, to push on to Merv itself. This plan involved a long journey overland to the frontier of the Akhal Tekkés north of Meshed, and he finally succeeded in reaching Askabad, a settlement not far from Gook Tepé, the stronghold of the Turceman tribes. With his field glass he was able to witness Skobeleff's great victory in January, 1881, and the dight of the Ahhal Tekkés after the battle. Askabad being an unsafe halting place while the Cossacks were scouring the plain, he resolved to proceed in haste to Merv, that mysterious city, of which Europeans then knew next to nothing. His enforced residence among the Mery Turcomans for five months is the central theme of this record of perilous adventure, and with the successful issue of the negotiations for his release his account of his wanderings is brought to a

Mr. O'Donovan's narrative is enlivened at every stage of his journey with illustrative aneedotes and personal incidents, and the extraordinary circumtances under which he entered Mery lend adventitions aid to the recital. His powers of observation are keen, his material has been collected with laborious effort and painstaking accuracy, and his style is natural and direct if not always graceful or increve. It is disappointing to find that with marked advantages of personal experience, and with literary habits theroughly formed in one of the best schools of English journalism, he has succeeded in making only a moderately interesting book, Two Americans, Mr. Schuyler and Mr. MacGahan, have written, less in detail but with far greater power, of the strange races inhabiting Central Asia. Their pictures of life and warfare in the deserts are more graphle than any which these pages bring before the eye, and while their personal ex periences are tame in comparison with Mr. O'Dono van's adventures, their general reflections upon the physical features of the Eastern world, the anarchie state of the tribes and the political relations of neighboring races are more comprehensive and valuable. Mr. O'Donovan seems to have been almost too inquistrious a diarist. At all times and under all circumstances he busied himself with taking notes in order to reproduce scenes and impressions with photographic accuracy. In fact, he was so constantly employed in the laborious process of collecting details that he had very little leisure for reflecting upon what was passing under his eyes and being transferred instantaneously to his note-be

One of the author's most effective passages is the account which he gives of his first glumpse of demestle life in the Turcoman villages. He had been invited by the Russian commander to leave the camp and return to the western shore of the Caspian, but had resolved to establish himself on the Persian frontier, where he could receive information of any military preparations that might be made. Halting after the first day's ride he discov. ered that he had neglected to provide himself with a passport, and while waiting to receive one from the Russian commander he lodged with a Turcoman family :

man family:

In these regions the entire family, male and female, dwell under the 'one roof, which covers but a single circular apartment, not more than lifteen feet in diameter. As I entered, they took me that I was khoch geldi (welcome), and I took may seat on a carpet beside the fire burning in the centre of the habitation. It was mainly composed of fragments and sparts of fishing boats, and the smoke found exit by the customary circular opening in the root, some six reet in diameter, and barred by radial spokes like those of a cart-whisel. A stately rather solid-looking matron of some forty years, entirely unveiled, sat beside the fire. Near her was a colossal smacrer, or tea-urn-a Russian institution which seems to have penetrated to the ultermost depths of Central Asia. Some young girls, her daughters, seated on either side, were busy grinding flour in a primitive horizontal hand-mill, kneading dough for the evening bread, or carding wool for the manufacture of carpets and the rude water-proof mantles worn by the Turcomans.

The elder lady was clad in a shirt of coarse silk, of a dark purple color, striped with black and falling nearly to the ankles. This, excepting the close-fitting trousers of a darker tint, and drawn tightly round the ankles, was the only garment worn by her. Around her head was twisted a handkerchief of bright crimson silk, turban-wise, one extremity falling upon the left shoulder. On her neck was a massive silver ornament, resembling more the collar of a Newloundland dog than any other object to which I can compare it, being at least an inch and a half in depth, and a third of an inch in thickness. At intervals round it were set flat oval cornelians, alternating with lovenge-

described by the Around her head was twisted a handkerelief of bright crimson slik, turban-wise, one extremity failing upon the left shoulder. On her need was a master silver or macenity resombling the containing and a silver of a Newtonian stead of the same of the color of a Newtonian stead of the same of the color of a Newtonian stead of the same of the color of a Newtonian stead of the same of the color of a Newtonian stead of the same of the color of a Newtonian stead of the same of the color of a Newtonian stead of the same of the color of a Newtonian stead of the same of the color of a Newtonian stead of the same of the color of a Newtonian stead of the same of the color of a Newtonian stead of the same of the color of a Newtonian stead of the same of the sa

centre of each of which was also set a flat comeian. Her long, course brir, plaited into two tails,
which reached below the small of her back, was
also profusely decorated with silver coins, growing
larger toward the extremity of the plaited hair
tail. On her wrists were massive silver bracelets—
so massive, and apparently so heavy, that one
could not but imagine that they must seriously interfere with the movements of her arms. They,
too, bore the usual lozenge-shaped gold canels and
flat cornelians. Turcoman women seem always to
be in full dress, and I have rarely seen them, even
when employed in laborious occupations, without
it. A ponderous parapherialia is a concomitant of
respectability, as it is understood in these parts.
The younger feralies were similarly, but less profinsely and massively decorated. In fact, as I
afterward learned, nearly the entire capital of a
Turcoman family is thus invested in family ornaments—a custom the adoption of which the ladies
at home would probably hail with a great deal of
pleasure. Still, for all their finery, there are no
more hard-working members of society than the
wives and daughters of the Khan's subjects. wives and daughters of the Khan's subjects.

The brief description given of the indoor amusements of these characteristic Asiatics is equally nteresting:

interesting:

I had an opportunity of witnessing some of the Tarcoman indoor amusements indused in during the long winter period of inaction following the long winter period of inaction following the gathering of the Larvest. They spend much of their time drinking scalding hot water, faintly that time drinking scalding hot water, faintly that or it is not when they cannot possibly swallow any more, and have passed the water-pipe round sufficiently often, they engage in a kind of game of odd and even, played with the knuckle bores of a sheep's foot, some of the pieces being stained red. The cluers occasionally play chest, usinly on a cotton handkerchief divided into squares by lines of black sutching. The aquares are all of the same color. The chessmen are of the most primitive pattern. The top of a cow's horn does duty as king; a similar article of smaller size as rier, or queen. The knights are represented by unright pieces of hone, each having two notches. The bishop, or, as the Turcomans term it, all, or elephant, is a piece of something in any shape; while the castes, or robbs, have the form of mishrooms. The game is the same as in Europe with some difference in the mother of casting, and division of the first two-square moves of each pawn into two, two pawas being aims tancously unveil forward one square each. They play very fairly, and even in the midst of the game make the moves with the most amizing rapidity. The spectates enthusiasis, chattering and squabbling over the relative merties of the different moves.

These Turcomans living near the Caspian have the game of characteristics of the Akhai Tekkes,

These Turcomans living near the Caspian have the general characteristics of the Akhal Tekhes, whose stronghold, several hundred miles in the interior, was captured by General Skobeled, and also of the Mery Tekkés, whose mode of life and tribalstudying. The foreress of Geok Tepe and the adja-cent settlement of Askabad, which now forms the Russian headquarters in the Trans-Caspian region, are half way between the sea and the Mery oasis, which lies due north of Herat. Mery is not a city, bat a group of settlements, and until this cour-ageous traveller role across the desert almost wholly unaftended, it had not been visited by any Euroappeared in these villages was very precareus. The defeat of the Akimi Tekkésin the west had consel walespread alarm throughout the casis. An namediate advance of the Russian column was exported, and the daring foreigner was exposed to the deadly peril of being mistaken for a spy and summarily put out of the way. The people were so startled by the rai id successes of the Cossacks that the atpenrance of any foreigner at such a crisis has certain to enrage them. Mr. O'Denevan's en dramatic circumstances and must be described in illi own words :

ms own words:

So far as my personal appearance went, I might have passed for anything. I were an enormous that of grayish black sheet skin, eighteen menoa in leacht. Over my shoulders was a drenched leopard skin, beheath which could be seen my travelstaned, much worn alster overcoat. My legs were equivasoned in long thack boots, armed with event steel sputs, appeadages afterly man own in Tarkestan. A subremme revolving eathing completed my outlit. So me seedle may wonder that I openly presented my-self in the midst of the Tekké population, maong whom the nature of my reception was at best doubtful, in such a mark as this, and way I did not assume a style of dress more in keepwas at best doubtful, in such mears as this, and why I did not assume a style of dress more in keeping with the custom of the country. I had considered this matter carefully before deciding upon the arrevocable step toward Mery. I could speak Jagatai fairly well, and my sun-tamed countries of the such a such as the such as the such and passably lengthy beard offered no extraorimary contrast to that of an inhabitant, but my accent, and a thousand other little circumstances, not to speak of the indiscretion of my servants, whom I knew perfectly well it was utterly useless to pledge to secreey, would have been chough to infallibly betray me. To appear in Turoman costume, or in any other which tended to conceal my real nationality and character would, ander the circumstances, have been to court to conceal my real nationality and character would, under the circumstances, have been to court almost certain destruction. I have to congratuate myself upon having adopted the course I did for subsequently, when taxed with having a covert and hostile mission to Mery, I was able to plend that in coming there I had made no attempt at a disguise, and that my servants, one of whom was of their own race, could speak as to the character in which I resided in derguez. I dismounted at the door of a hat to which my borse was percented in the course of a few years and in view of the attitude of the people, I for the first time fully realized the risks which at the commencement of my venture I had so gavly freed—at best, captivity for an indefinite period. commencement of my venture I had so gayly faced
—at best, captivity for an indefinite period.

Nevertheless, I was so delighted to have reached
my long-conclit destination, and to be at Merc at
last, in spite of all the difficulties which the nature
of the ground, the efforts of adversaries and the
pealousy of the population had cast in my way, that
my pleasurable emotions overcame all others.
Here I was, at last, in the heart of the Turcoman
territory. Let the future take care of itself.

On the following day the mysterious stranger was taken to the headquariers of the Tekké Government in the easis, where after a period of imprisonment in a tent and of painful uncertainty in regard to his fate, he succeeded in establishing his identity with the nation which had invaded Afghanistan in the south and was supposed by the desert tribes to be the implacable enemy of Russia. During the first month of his residence he was the victim of a curlosity almost maddening. Long before the sur was above the horizon his tent would be crammed with "dressing-gown-robed, sheepskin-clad gigantic hatted beings," eager to see the traveller who had fallen among them as it were from the clouds, Relays upon relays of sight-seers besieved his abode, and he was gazed at with the ludicrous eagerness which may be observed in baboons and apes when some unfamiliar object meets their eyes. Those inside the tent would store at him by the hour, and simultaneously from without scores of eyes peeped through every nook and eranny of the tent walls. Business in the baznars was suspended and sometimes the press of the throng would be so great that the tent would be lifted from its fasten-ings and brought down upon his head. One glance at his tunic and riding breeches, would not suffice, The sight-seers would return again and again to the only peep-show in the oasis. Every movement which he made was commented upon. The manner in which he washed his hands and face called forth load exclamations, and the operation or combing his hair seemed to please them beyond measure. Gulliver in Liliput was not subjected to closer scrutiny or to more constant surveillance than this special correspondent, who was utterly at a loss to make his termenters understand that England did not lie to the south in the direction of Candahar or

what a newspaper in the Occident could be. Before many weeks had passed the Englishman was released from strict captivity and permitted to go about and explore the oasis. The fact that the Russians had not gone on in their career of conquest, but had suspended operations at Askabad, was ascribed partly to their fear of the English but mainly to the presence of the distinguished captive in Merv. He improved his situation at an oportune moment by handing to the most influential chiefs certain gifts, with which he had provided himself before leaving Persia. The scene illus trated the characteristic traits of tent-life in the

cried. "Six hundred krans! why, I would not give you two for it!" Then throwing it contemptionsly on the carpet close to me, he said 'Take back your box, and give me the money!' I must admit that I was considerably taken aback by the manner in which my present was treated. However, I had, at a bound, gamed an onormous insight into the mental temperament of Turcoman chiefs. I replied, "Certainly, Khan, if you wish; but I thought you might be oftended if I merely oftered you the money." Then, with an aftectation of great magnificance, I drew from my pocket the twenty-five pounds in gold, and handed it to him. "By God!" exclaimed he, "that is right: I am satisfied."

The customs and mode of life of the Mery Tekkés bear so close a resemblance to those of the wandering races of Northern Turkestan previously described by Mr. Schuyler and Mr. MacGahan that these pages often lose the charm of novelty. A few striking passages may be quoted as being markedly characteristic:

characteristic:

Our repact finished, we all said grace. Turcomans never by any chance, whether at home or in the desert, neglect this common. Holding our islend hands before us, in the fashion of an open block, we prayed in muttered tones. What the terms of the prayer were I was mover able to catch, but I muttered away as well as the best of them. Then, separating our palms, the closur resting on the hirs, we each exclaimed with nection, and in subduced tones, "El hands Lullah" (Praise be to God). Then we stroked our bearts, with the right and left hands alternately, and looked cantiously over our shoulders, right and left, lest Shaitan (the devil) might be lurking high as. A deep, heavily drawn sigh, by way of expressing the stonachic oppression which we experienced from the completeness of our meal, and cructations, natural or forced, were polite and indispensable recognitions of our host's hospitality. To refuse to cut a consumnable quantity of the food set before you would be an unparalonable offence. To do the reverse is to exhibit a good feeling, which raises you in the estimation of your entertainer.

the lowing and blenting of the homeward-driven the lowing and her is as they entered the various walled enclosures where they were placed for safety during the night. A curious Tarcoman superstation here came under my notice. As, lost in reverie, I sat by the window half enconsciously I commenced whistling softly some statches of tones. I noticed a general movement of desartisfaction among my companions. They shifted in their seats, looked amousily at each other and at me. At leneth Mahdua. Kuli tonethin ac on the shoulder and said. 'For God's sake, Sahib, don't whistle any more. I feared that I had an writingly committed some great breach of decorum, and accordingly, excusing myself, relaysed into silence. After a while I whistened to the morilab beside me, and asked why Makdua Kuli of lected to my whisting. 'I hat at this hour the glouis and give are abroad and are wandering to and frod II they heat you whatle they will suppose you are calling them; and, Hisanilah, we have no desire for their company." I afterward learned that to which in the daytime is a telen of defance, and not considered proper when others are by.

inside the cettself, to withe a the unfolding of these wenderful documents. There was a hadrons missappresension as to the nature of these papers as I have alvesty stated. Thromans have but firstle idea of the value of gold, their currency being almost entirely of silver. Of paper maney they have but a very shadowy notion indeed. They first became aware of its existence through having sailed some financing paper remarks when raiding seem the lines of computation between Ramiana Landertees. treme disappointment displayed monttler confi-tenances when I told them that the documents in question were simply rost namely, or newspapers. The counting old ex-Vizir, however, felt quite satis-fied that they were paper money, and that my statement to the other effect was made simply in order to throw dust in their eyes and thus guar-ance my own secure possession of the money.

have few of the redeeming traits of Orientals. OUT TO-DAY. Their prevailing vice is gluttony. Their main occupation is raiding. The population is divided into two classes, one of which has a purely honorary precedence over the other. Owing to the unand the rules of ancient towns, which are to be found on every side, were built by races which have left no other traces behind them of their existence Mr. O'Donovan is inclined to believe that the country now occupied by the Mervan Akhal Tekkés was peopled a hundred and fifty years ago by a settled Turkish population of the same rice as the present inhabitants of Bokhara. Certainly the Akhal Tekkés have been in possession of their present territory barely more than a century, and their brethren in Mery have not been in the oasis longer than a single generation. They had established themselves in Persian territory at Sarakhs, but were finally driven out into the desert. Mery had been Jeserted by the Turcomans of Bokhara and was an easy conquest, and when the Persians attacked the Tekkés in their new settlements the fortune of war changed. Since their successful defence of their settlements they have remained in undesputed posses sion of the casis. The fertility of the soil has been increased by an imperfect system of irrigating canals and an attempt has been made to introduce a police force. The inhabitants have remained, however, an irregularly organized band of desert bandits. Robbery may not be considered alto gether legitimate, but if it be well executed moral reprobation is wholly overpowered. Petty stealing is very rare, because even among these nomads there is an instinctive feeling of the necessity of a some sort of law. A marauder on the caravan road or a plunderer on the Persian frontier is not looked upon as a thief, but rather as an energetic and

industrious patriot. The interest in these volumes is centred upon the personal experiences of the author in effecting his escape from the oasis rather than upon the characteristics of the people with whom he was brought in contact. As soon as they were rersuaded that be was not one of their enemies, the Russlans, they were convinced that he must be a most useful and powerful friend. They were unwilling to have him eave the oasis. They were anxious to have him reside with them permanently in order to afford them immunity from Russian invasion. They locked upon him as a paladin who, as far as they could understand, had already protected them when they were menaced with attack. They could not understand why, having come voluntarily among them, and risked much to do so, he should wish to leave them and go back to his own country. They gave him an important office, they offered him as many wives as he would consent to take, they named all the newly born infants after him, and treated him with such delicate consideration that he found it a most difficult matter to negotiate his release. If Mr. O'Donovan had possessed even the faintest gleams of humor, he would have been

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